

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY – THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE

II. THE FATHER DELIVERS UP AND BETRAYS HIS SON UNTO DEATH FOR OUR SAKE

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” Romans 8:32

- A. The phrase in the Romans text, ‘gave (him) up,’ sometimes translated ‘delivered (him) up’ is a single word in Greek, not simply the verb “to give” followed by the preposition “up.” It is a single and very strong word, which in the Bible, is used only in a negative sense. Its meaning is more along the lines of ‘betray,’ ‘deliver up,’ or ‘cast out.’ In the crucifixion, the Father abandoned His Son.
- B. This is profoundly illustrated in the Gospel accounts of the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus is *“greatly distressed and troubled [fearful]” (Mark 14:33)*. He cries out with His usual intimate address of “Abba, Father.” However, this prayer comes with a fair degree of agitation, making it distinct from His normal times of solitude with the Father.
- C. Mark records this prayer as almost being a command or demand: *“Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me” (Mark 14:36)*. He returns to the friends He so desperately desires standing with Him, but He finds them asleep. He is apparently distraught, and not simply for the disciples’ sake.
 1. I believe that when Jesus says, *“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38)* He is not only talking about Peter, He is talking about Himself. He is experiencing the depths of His own weakness. He is looking for any possible way out of drinking the cup set before Him. He returns to pray again, for it appears that the Father is not responding. He has received no answer. The Father is silent. Jesus is left alone.
 2. That we should balk at such a suggestion indicates that we underestimate the intensity of Jesus’ sufferings and the reality of His humanity. He had the same weak flesh that all of the disciples did.
 3. “This unanswered prayer is the beginning of Jesus’ real passion—his agony at his forsakenness by the Father.”¹ Jesus’ suffering was not primarily physical. It was primarily emotional and relational distress in His abandonment by the Father. At the cross, Jesus was orphaned.

¹ Jurgen Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981): 76. Hereafter TK

- D. Why was Jesus overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death? Because of his impending physical suffering? The apostles and other martyrs were able to face death unafraid because of their confidence in the resurrection and the hope of heaven. Surely Jesus could have had such. Indeed his terror was concerning that of an entirely other order well beyond physical pain. Jesus knew well of the existence beyond earthly pain and that is precisely what terrified him – his separation from the world surrounding earthly existence, which He had been a glad participant of for eternity past.
- E. Up until this point, Jesus had experienced uninterrupted, infinite pleasure in His relationship with His Father. The flow of love between them had never been decreased or affected to any degree. Now however, Jesus is aware that something is terribly wrong. It is something He has never remotely experienced before. It is a torturous pain infinitely beyond our comprehension. We have never come close to experiencing the relationship the Father and Son shared and thus cannot imagine how deeply this separation tore His inner being.
1. The ‘cup’ is not simply physical suffering—it is the ultimate identification with the plight of humanity in their suffering and alienation since the Fall—alienation from God and from each other. In the events to follow, Jesus would find his disciples to desert Him, and His Father to be silent in His darkest hour of need.
 2. “Not only in the eyes of the world and his disciples, nay, in his own eyes too did Christ see himself as lost, as forsaken by God, felt in his conscience that He Himself was lost, as forsaken by God, suffered the torments of the damned, who feel God’s eternal wrath, shrink back from it and flee.”²
 3. “He was not merely assailed by fear and suffering in his human nature, as scholastic tradition would have it. He was assailed in his person, his very essence, in his relationship to the Father – in His divine sonship.”³
- F. This suffering climaxes in Jesus’ dramatic cry from the cross, when He *“cried with a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mark 15:34)*. This is the only time in the entire Bible when Jesus uses the formal address “God” rather than “Father.” Here, His forsakenness by the Father is full and complete. It is full and complete identification with our God-forsakenness in which His forsakenness and alienation overpowers and overcomes our own.
1. “Here in the relationship between the Father and the Son, a death was experienced which has been rightly described as ‘eternal death,’ ‘the death of God.’ Here God is forsaken by God.” The monumental nature of this event, considering the eternal union between Father and Son, cannot be exaggerated or overstated.

² TK, 77.

³ Ibid.

2. “If we take the relinquishment of the Father’s name in Jesus’ death cry seriously, then this is even the breakdown of the relationship that constitutes the very life of the Trinity: if the Father forsakes the Son, the Son does not merely lose His sonship. The Father loses his fatherhood as well. The love that binds the one to the other is transformed into a dividing curse.”
 3. “It is only as the One who is forsaken and cursed that the Son is still the Son. It is only as the One who forsakes, who surrenders the other, that the Father is still present.” In this moment, the only sense in which Jesus is the Son is that of a forsaken and abandoned Son. The Father is only the Father of Jesus as the one who has turned His back and allowed “the punishment that brought us peace” to fall on Him (Isaiah 53:5).
- G. The love that They shared now becomes a curse that divides Them, an arrow that strikes unspeakable pain to the deepest parts of who They are.
1. The openness of the Fellowship of the Trinity that it would undergo such intense suffering to welcome in those who have turned against them as enemies resounds as to how relational they are to the core. To open themselves in such a way to embrace enemies shows how committed they are to overcome alienation, to not ‘leave us as orphans (John 14:18),’ for us not merely to be loved from a distance but to be welcomed home as sons and daughters. They sacrificed their own unbroken fellowship, so we might share it with them.
 2. After speaking of the value of wisdom, Bernard of Clairvaux exclaims, “there is something else that moves me, arouses and enflames me even more. Good Jesus, the chalice you drank, the price of our redemption, makes me love you more than all the rest. This alone would be enough to claim our love. This, I say, is what wins our love so sweetly, justly demands it, firmly binds it, deeply affects it. Our Savior had to toil so hard in this, in fact in making the whole world the Creator did not labor so much. Then he spoke and they were made; he commanded and they were created. But in saving us he had to endure men who contradicted his words, criticized his actions, ridiculed his sufferings, and mocked his death. See how much he loved us. Add to this the fact that he was not returning love but freely offering it.”⁴
 3. I would further add that He endured the abandonment of His Father. “See how much He loves us...”

⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs Volume 1* 20.2, trans. Kilian Walsh (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1971), 148.

III. THE SON VOLUNTARILY GIVES HIMSELF UP FOR US

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.” Isaiah 53:7

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” John 10:14-18

- A. While it is true that the Father delivered up His Son to death, this was certainly not against His will. He voluntarily gave up His life.
- B. This is what Jesus is communicating in John 10, known as the ‘Good Shepherd’ discourse. Shepherd is not simply a metaphor for a cute and cuddly guy who leads us to green pastures. In the Ancient Near East it was a metaphor for kingship and rulership.
- C. This passage is in dynamic contrast to Ezekiel 34, when God issues a strong word against the kings and rulers of Israel saying,

“Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. ⁶My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.” Ezekiel 34:2-6

- D. God rebukes them for a lack of compassionate care and self-less service to the people. Shepherds indeed exist, not to be fed by the flock, but to feed them. He promises that *He Himself* will come and shepherd the people: *“I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice” (Ezekiel 34:16).*

- E. In John 10, Jesus is saying more than that He is a decent shepherd, He is identifying Himself with the promise of God's coming to be the shepherd. He is not saying He is a good shepherd, but THE Good Shepherd, good in contrast to all others who came before. He will bring back the strayed, bind up the injured, strengthen the weak (Eze. 34:16), bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captives, comfort those who mourn, provide for those who grieve, and announce the year of God's favor (Isaiah 61:1ff).
- F. Jesus however, adds a dimension not discussed in Ezekiel. He says, *"I lay down my life for the sheep."* This is the pinnacle mark distinguishing Jesus' leadership from that of all other leaders they have known.
- G. When seeking to understand Jesus' Lordship we *cannot* look to merely human examples. We cannot study kings throughout history who rule by anxiety, jealousy and greed. Their cruel domination and brutal strangle-hold over the people lest someone usurp one degree of their power cannot be our paradigm for Jesus' kingship and leadership. To discover the heart of Jesus' kingship, *we must* look to the inner-Trinitarian anguish experienced in Their separation; we must look to the cross.
- H. This is where Jesus defines His own leadership. He defines it in terms of suffering and death *for the people*. It centers not on the execution of wrath upon the violators of the law for the preservation of order in the kingdom. Its crux is found in His bearing of the punishment to turn aside wrath from the people for the sake of *unhindered fellowship* in the kingdom.

IV. AS BOTH THE FATHER AND THE SON SACRIFICE AND SUFFER, THEY ARE UNITED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHO JOINS AND UNITES THE SON IN HIS FORSAKENNESS WITH THE FATHER

"how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." Hebrews 9:14

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." 1 John 4:9-10

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³Who shall bring any charge against God's elect..." Romans 8:31-33

- A. It is not as though the Son was the only one who suffered during this time. The Father equally suffered. We cannot adequately approach describing how excruciating it was for the Father to turn from communicating love to His Son, to scorning and cursing Him. While the Son's giving of His life was undoubtedly an act of self-giving love, the Father's giving of the Son was equally such.
- B. Though it is true that the Son suffered the death and hell of separation from the Father, the Father, in His execution of wrath, loses His Son. We cannot overestimate or exaggerate how significant this was. Jesus was the one who was dearest, nearest and closest to the Father's heart. This is the intent of the Romans 8 passage. If the Father can give us His Son, He can surely give us anything else.
- C. This anguish of the Father is the darkness that filled the sky at *the sixth hour (Matt. 27:45)*, which is not six o'clock in our time, but is midday. At noon darkness shrouded the land with an unspeakable sadness, described in Amos 8:9-10:
- “And on that day,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. ¹⁰I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist and baldness on every head; I will make it like the mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day.*
- D. When Jesus offered up prayers and supplications to the Father with loud groanings and tears (Heb. 5:7), what must the Father have felt in refusing to answer His Son's request – to allow Him to die alone. The knowledge that He would answer three days later certainly did not dissipate the pain of Jesus in that moment and it is unlikely that it did for the Father either.
- E. “Here the innermost life of the Trinity is at stake. Here the communicating love of the Father turns into infinite pain over the sacrifice of the Son. Here the responding love of the Son becomes infinite suffering over his repulsion and rejection by the Father. What happens on Golgotha reaches into the innermost depths of the Godhead, putting its impress on the Trinitarian life.”⁵
- F. The love that They shared now becomes a curse that divides Them, an arrow that strikes unspeakable pain to the deepest parts of who They are. We know from personal experience that pain is more intense the more deeply we love another. The people who are closest to us, our family and dearest friends, often have the greatest capacity to hurt us.
- G. The Father did not cease to love the Son at this moment. Rather, He infinitely loved Him with deep passion as much as ever. The Father loved the Son no less when He turned His face, gave Him up and crushed Him. The Son likewise loved the Father no less when such was done to Him. The presence of infinite love joined with complete abandonment translates to pain and sorrow infinitely beyond our comprehension.

⁵ TK, 81.

- H. This is God’s ultimate identification with humanity. We are fully known by Him (1 Cor. 13:12). He became like us in every way, in the deepest way (Hebrews 2:17).
1. He demonstrates that He, without fail, heard the cry, the groan of humanity in their plight of fallenness. He here, beyond all doubt, validates the anguish and suffering of humanity’s condition of separation from God. If such was not the case, if the suffering of humanity is exaggerated or overemphasized, one would have to say that the cross was more than necessary and humanity does not need God.
 2. We are a suffering people. This entire age, from the Fall until the Second coming is a period of plight. Paul calls it “*the sufferings of the present time*” in Romans 8. By that he did not mean the immediate present for him personally, but the entire “time” of suffering which will only be overturned by the liberation of the whole creation at the coming of God. While it is certainly true that the cross is about the suffering of the Godhead, the suffering of the Godhead in the cross is about the suffering of humanity.
 3. Until we grasp this we will never understand the cross, but will see it as little more than a sacrificial ritual meant to appease the “wrath of the gods.” The purpose of the cross was always so much bigger – the destruction of death, the emancipation of those enslaved in fear of death, the annihilation of alienation and the unification of God and humanity. Such demands that we not think of the cross with “appeasement of wrath” as our primary category.
 4. Until we come to terms with our fallen, isolated, alienated state of suffering, we cannot understand the full meaning of the cross. There was provision for the forgiveness of sins and by extension, the appeasement of wrath under the sacrificial system. However, there was not yet the drawing near of God in complete identification with the human condition that opened the way for complete unification. If the sufferings of the Godhead are divorced from the sufferings of humanity, we may fall prey to viewing the cross as not even a slight upgrade from the sacrificial system, but merely a permanent installment saving us the cost, mess and inconvenience of continually offering sacrifices.
 5. Why is the cross a reality? It is certainly not because of sin. Sin in and of itself presents history with several options. The presence of sin does not inherently demand or require God to experience the cross. The cross does not by necessity follow from sin hence we cannot call sin the reason for the existence of the cross-event as a historical fact. It is merely part of situation in which the cross arises.

6. The cross exists because of the compassion and sympathy, the *suffering together with* of the Trinitarian Community and humanity. “Suffering together with” is the root meaning of compassion, from Latin; and sympathy, from Greek. The overflowing outwardly-moving love of the Fellowship of the Trinity manifests itself in an emotional state that is not unmoved by human suffering and pain, but indeed suffers together with it in a way that motivates movement to alleviate and eliminate it.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15

“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ‘Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.’” Isaiah 53:3-4

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Matthew 9:36

7. The cross tells us that God heard this cry of suffering. Even when we did not know how to express what we felt, even when we were oblivious to it in our neurotic yet socially acceptable pursuit of pain-numbers, when the cry was without words but only expressed in the desperateness, disconnectedness and despair of our existence, He heard the words we could not speak.
8. Not only did He validate our pain, but He entered into our pain. He not only heard our cry, but He lived our cry—He experienced it first hand. God knows what it is like to be alienated from God. He knows the groan of separation, the pain of loneliness, the torments of isolation, the torture of being cut off from His most basic connectedness. They knew directly the anguish of alienation from God that for now we predominately know only in its distillating effects.

“You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?” Psalm 56:8

9. Psalm 56:8 is a beautiful verse that describes how God captures every one of our tears in a bottle and records our laments on a scroll. He takes notice of every cry. How powerful this truth is, yet in the cross He did so much more. He entered fully into our pain and it made it fully His own. The Father was without the Son and the Son without the Father, both feeling the anguish of estrangement, the agony of isolation. *They suffer together with us.*

- I. However, at this point, when the Father fully offers the Son up to death and the Son fully lays down His own life, there is a complete unity of will between them.
 1. There is complete agreement that this death should occur to open up life for all humanity. This intense oneness of desire occurs at precisely the moment when the Father and Son are farthest separated.
 2. While Jesus dies utterly abandoned by God, dying ‘without God,’ in a sense their alienation and isolation embodies a single act of self-surrender and symbolizes the profundity of their self-giving love in eternity.
 3. Even when separated, they are one. *Hebrews 9:14* says that Jesus, “*through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, [to] purify our conscience from works that lead to death to serve the living God.*” In their isolation, their unified act of will takes place “*through the eternal Spirit.*” In a sense, the Holy Spirit is the link that joins the Father and the Son, even in the midst of their darkest hour.
 4. In their farthest separation, they are one. The bridge of their relationship bore the weight of all the sin and death of all humanity for all time. Through the bond of the Spirit, their relationship did not give way but triumphed over the totality of sin and death. Here the most profound alienation is overcome by what is demonstrated to be an even more profound love. Thus, the Godhead’s inner alienation overcomes our alienation.

- J. The Father delivers up the Son “for us all.” The Son lays down His life “for the sheep.” This takes place “*through the eternal Spirit,*” The Father, Son and Spirit are one in this act of love that sacrifices what is closest and most dear for the sake of an Other. This undeniably demonstrates to us that God *is love*, a love that moves outward, a love that is open, a love that embraces, accomplishing such at intense personal cost.

- K. This defeat of alienation, paired with the resurrection opens a horizon for the surmounting of death, for the overcoming of the suffering human condition in its God-forsakenness. This death-blow to estrangement opens a door of hope to the unification of all things in which *“he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, so making peace,¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”* (Ephesians 2:14-22).